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Revisiting Jeanne Dielman: *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* (2004), *Woman Sitting After Killing* (2001), and Akerman's 'cinéma de ressassement'

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Abstract:

This article revisits *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), seeking to map its nomadic trajectories through different media. I elaborate on Akerman's notion of a 'cinéma de ressassement', a cinema of mulling over or chipping away. Rather than focusing on the film itself, I concentrate on two lesser-known works that explicitly return to *Jeanne Dielman*, functioning both as works in their own right and as paratexts, revealing the film's processes in different but corresponding ways: the installation *Woman Sitting After Killing*, made for the 2001 Venice Biennale, and *Autour de Jeanne Dielman*, a making-of documentary shot on Portapak by Sami Frey in 1975, edited by Akerman and Agnès Ravez in 2004, and released as a special feature on the Criterion Collection DVD edition of the film. The article contends that these two 'returns' to *Jeanne Dielman* each rework the complex temporalities of the film as well as revisiting its political concerns. *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* places *Jeanne Dielman* squarely within a feminist framework through its central positioning of Delphine Seyrig's feminist discourse. I map the ways in which *ressassement* exposes the processes of a feminist filmmaking concerned with disrupting 'chrononormative' (Elizabeth Freeman) narratives. Building on B. Ruby Rich's characterisation of Akerman's work as a 'cinema of correspondence', ultimately the article asks

what counts as productive labour, suggesting that Akerman's returns to Jeanne Dielman highlight its commitment to feminist and queer failure as a productive working method.

Keywords: Akerman, Seyrig, installation, Portapak, Jeanne Dielman, *ressassement*, chrononormativity

Akerman's most celebrated film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Rue du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (hereafter *Jeanne Dielman*), is a film about time, ritual, repetition and re-enactment. There is so much to say about the various temporalities explored within the film - and their gradual unravelling - and so much has been said, that one might be tempted to claim that the protagonist of the film is not Jeanne Dielman, but time itself, notable in its alternation between strict, almost metronomic measurement and the abyss of seemingly infinite duration as it imposes itself upon the viewer. As B. Ruby Rich writes about the film, never before had 'the materiality of woman's time in the home been rendered so viscerally' (1998: 170). In *L'Image-temps*, Deleuze writes about the relationship between gesture and time in Akerman's work: 'Starting with Jeanne Dielman, Chantal Akerman wants to show gestures in their fullness [...] in the same place or in space, a woman's body achieves a strange nomadism which makes it cross ages, situations and places' (1985: 256). The echoes of Proust here are poignant, and particularly apt for Akerman whose cinema seems to echo, or even enact, the Proustian search for 'un peu de temps à l'état pur' ('a fragment of time in its pure

state', 1989: 451) so incessantly across her work, not only in her adaptation of Proust's *La Prisonnière* (the fifth volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*) in *La Captive* (2000). This article will address the 'strange nomadism' enacted by the body of Jeanne Dielman, both the film and the character, as she traverses time. It explores what the trajectory tells us about the relationship of Akerman's film to feminism in the light of recent returns in feminist and queer theory to issues of temporality, temporal distortion and re-enactment. I am interested not so much in slowness, then, but in repetition, ritual and return as it plays across character, film, and Akerman's re-visiting of her own work in two key paratexts: *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* (2004) and *Woman Sitting After Killing* (2001). I will start with a discussion of the film's exploration of time, before moving on to the 'making-of' documentary in order to situate and address *Jeanne Dielman*'s feminist politics; finally I will discuss the 2001 installation work, looking at how this particular return further develops Akerman's process of cinematic 'ressassement'.

For Akerman herself, time and its manipulation was an obsession. In *Autoportrait en cinema*, she writes: 'we often say I didn't see the time go by. Can you see time? And if we haven't seen time go by, isn't it as if time has been stolen from us? Because time is all we have' (Akerman, 2004: 39). Here she seems to neatly summarise what we might think of as Proustian cinema: a cinema that offers to its spectators the gift of time in so many different permutations, perhaps a cinema in search of lost or wasted time. In *Jeanne Dielman*, this draws from the 'hyperreal' time of potato peeling, to the intimate time of embodied experience, hinted at not least in the apparent climax in the film's single sex scene, to the intricate time of still life present in the slow, still shots throughout

Not forgetting the important prefix, this is not just a search, then, but re-search, involving a continual going back. Never content with leaving the past, Akerman writes, again in *Autoportrait en cinéaste*, 'je suis une ressasseuse' ('I can't leave things alone' 2004: 9). She explains: 'there is nothing to mull over [ressasser], my father would say, there is nothing to say, my mother would say. And it is on this nothing that I work' (2004: 12-13). Her use of this verb 'ressasser' (to chip away, to mull over, to dwell on, to rehearse, or to keep banging on about), evokes a continual revisiting or haunting, a movement characterised by reworking and repetition. And the 'nothing' that informs this is suggestive of absurd futility, of a Sisyphean¹ or Beckettian struggle,² whilst encompassing a sense of the importance of minute detail, the chipping away or trotting over of something that others deem either unimportant or impossible to articulate. As the title of Ivone Margulies' book on Akerman's 'hyperrealist everyday' (1996) reminds us, 'nothing happens' in Akerman's films.

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The movement of a continual return to nothing, or even of a continual rehearsal of nothing, provokes a form of temporal distortion that appears anachronistic, in the sense that it performs a dwelling on gestures, events and images that are out of harmony with the present, even jarring and uncomfortable. Quotidian tasks are rendered unnatural or even mildly incoherent through the way they occupy time in the film; the way, for example, the palpable presence of physical objects - bedsheets, potatoes, letters - takes up the film's time; these objects may appear anachronistic in the sense that they do not allow for a moving forward; they refer, as we will see with *Woman Sitting* to a form of still life that is out of sync, or out of time with film's commitment to movement. Potato peeling becomes a making strange (a ritual of estrangement) of female drudgery. Akerman sought to exploit this untimeliness whilst resisting any form of opportunism, when it chimed so well with feminist concerns of the time (relating to the prostitutes' strikes in France marking the birth of the modern day sex worker's movements, as well as the US and the UK; to Wages for Housework; and as Ivone Margulies mentions, one of the articles that appeared in an issue of *Les Temps Modernes*, edited by Simone de Beauvoir, was called 'Peeling Potatoes' (Margulies, 2009). This perhaps goes some way towards explaining her ambivalence about the film being embraced by feminist film critics shortly after its release in 1975,.

Akerman often insisted that it is not a film about 'women's repression under patriarchy' (Margulies, 2009), but an attempt to re-visit the gestures of her own mother and aunt. According to Giorgio Agamben in his 'Notes on Gesture', this is the very essence of cinema: '*In the cinema, a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss*' (Agamben, 2000: 52.

Agamben's emphasis). Akerman herself summarises the film as 'about loss, about a nostalgia for lost rituals' (Akerman, 2004: 38). In a very concrete and specific sense, Akerman was seeking to reclaim and record her family's lost gestures, themselves a record, she suggests elsewhere, of lost Jewish rituals.

Jeanne Dielman implies a continual dwelling on 'temps perdu' by rendering once invisible quotidian tasks and gestures unfamiliar. According to Danièle Huillet, what was most striking about Delphine Seyrig's performance in the film was how obvious it was that she had never before peeled a potato or made a bed (Huillet 1982: 11). This making visible through very conscious performance implies continual rehearsing; Seyrig's performance drawing attention to the fact, precisely, that Seyrig is *not* Jeanne; that she has never had to peel her own potatoes or sell sex for a living, and that, at the same time as watching Jeanne Dielman, we are watching Delphine Seyrig peel potatoes. If Akerman at the time seemed keen to distance the film from a feminist perspective, in spite of the very obvious resonances, and to the frustration of feminists who saw their formal politics reflected in such a material way in it, this rendering strange of potato peeling that she didn't want to relate to its contemporary moment now relates to a specific moment in the past, and to perhaps one of the most important films in feminist cinematic history. In other words, potato peeling in the cinema now may appear anachronistic precisely because it instantly recalls *Jeanne Dielman*.

Elizabeth Freeman writes about 'the power of anachronism to unsituate viewers from the present tense they think they know, and to illuminate or even prophetically ignite possible futures in light of powerful historical moments'

(2010: 61), arguing for the transformative power of re-enactment and anachronistic interruption, for temporal lapses and folds that interrupt the tyranny of the teleological and the chronological. According to Freeman, these disruptions work to undo the violence of what she terms 'chrononormativity', which is the 'temporal regulation that renders bodies socially meaningful or legible' (2010: 61). In the light of this, Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* certainly represents a powerful historical moment in the context of feminist cinema, and this article seeks to trace a map of Akerman's returns to *Jeanne Dielman* and to interrogate how these returns echo feminist and queer critiques of linear, chronological time. Akerman's career was in some senses haunted by the success of *Jeanne Dielman*, which quickly became, and remained, her most celebrated film. It rapidly became a 'classic' in the sense that it was perceived as timeless; as the film's cinematographer Babette Mangolte writes, *Jeanne Dielman* outlives the conventions of 1970s cinema and continues to 'move' its viewers.

She describes this timelessness as 'miraculous', relating it to the power of Seyrig's gestures: 'the repressed and unspeakable passion of Jeanne who embodies the immobility of the world and the sudden transformation of this world into mystery' (in Akerman 2004: 176). The 'passion of Jeanne' of course recalls Dreyer's Jeanne in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1928), and is no doubt an implicit reference for Akerman, as for Mangolte. *The Passion of Joan of Arc*'s repetitive, intense attention to miniscule facial gestures is explored through the close-up, whilst Akerman prefers mid-length shots that situate Jeanne more clearly within a terrestrial setting; but Mangolte's comments equally echo Deleuze's point linking Seyrig's gestures to the ceremonial. For Akerman, the success of *Jeanne Dielman* was at times a source of frustration. She

complains, in a 2011 interview with Nicole Brenez, that people kept wanting her to remake the film. Equally, its success was a source of anxiety, as she recalls asking herself, aged 25, at the Cannes screening of the film, how she could ever do better and states that she doesn't know if she ever did ('here things get complicated. I'd done what I wanted to do, so what to do next?' Brenez, 2011). Yet in spite of her reticence about the film, she never quite managed to leave it alone.

Autour de Jeanne Dielman: re-situating feminist concerns



Whilst Akerman was at times reticent about associating the film with feminist politics, the making-of documentary *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* tells a different story. This is as much about Seyrig's role in the film, placing her political discourse into sharp focus. The footage in *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* was filmed in 1975 by Sami Frey, who was Seyrig's partner at the time, and was edited in

2004 by Agnès Ravez and Chantal Akerman, cutting across these two dates (sometimes simply referred to as a film from 1975), released as an extra for the DVD edition of the film. According to many accounts, bootleg copies of a version of the videotape filmed by Frey (not the same version as the 2004 edit) circulated throughout the 80s, although it was never officially released.

During the mid 1970s, Seyrig was deeply involved in French feminist and sex workers' movements, and was present during the prostitutes' strike in Lyon in 1975. She was also for the first time making her own work, having recently discovered portable video technology. In 1976 three video documentaries, all made on the Sony Portapak, appeared: her own project *Sois-Belle et tais-toi* (1976), about sexism in the film industry, as well as the collectively made tapes *SCUM Manifesto* (1976), an adaptation of Valerie Solanas' infamous manifesto, designed to rescue it from oblivion at a moment when it was out of print, and *Miso et maso vont en bateau* (1976), a reworking of a misogynist television show, prepared for the end of the United Nations' declared 'International Women's Year' (1975). As one of the pioneers of feminist video practice, Seyrig's role in Akerman's filmmaking trajectory, as *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* itself demonstrates, was decisive, in quite practical terms. On the one hand, the presence of the Portapak was to have an important role in Akerman's directing of Seyrig; they spent a month together in Brussels, filming rehearsals on Seyrig's Portapak and watching them back that same evening (Akerman 2004: 79). This re-watching was enabled by one of the advantages of video technology at the time, which was that tape, unlike 35mm film, didn't have to be processed in order to be seen. Video thus enables a distinct reflective element to Akerman's

directing of Seyrig, arguably shifting hierarchies through enabling the collective experience of watching, and consulting, together. In terms of Seyrig's more long-term influence on Akerman, it was Seyrig who, via her support for feminist filmmaking, introduced Akerman to Claire Atherton, the daughter of her life-long friend Ioana Wieder, with whom Seyrig founded the Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in 1982. Atherton and Akerman first worked together in 1984 when Seyrig asked them to film *Letters Home*, a play by Françoise Merle based on Sylvia Plath's letters to her mother. Delphine Seyrig plays the mother, whilst her niece Coralie Seyrig plays Plath, in a mother-daughter letter-writing relationship which no doubt interested Akerman, given her fascination with the role of mothers and letters in her work. As B. Ruby Rich writes, Akerman's is a 'cinema of correspondence', both in terms of its explicit use of 'introspective missives sent out into the world' and its structural attention to 'the answering of things to each other' (Rich, 1998: 75). This equally plays out in Akerman's working relationships, which weave together the feminist filmmaking communities in Paris with families of women; not just mothers and daughters, but also sisters and aunts. Atherton and Akerman would go on to collaborate over a period of thirty-one years, working on more than thirty-five projects, some of which Atherton's sister, the cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton, was also involved in.

In addition to this more practical influence, *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* equally reveals Akerman and Seyrig's mutual influence on each other's work as it plays out on set. One of the most striking features of *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* is the amount of time Akerman and Seyrig spend debating how to carry out the specific gestures inspired by Akerman's memories of her mother and aunt; with Seyrig

expressing frustration at the obsessive precision of Akerman's script, leaving her little space for improvisation, whilst Akerman struggles to describe Dielman's gestures, emphatically refusing any kind of psychoanalytic framework that would provide motivation (responding to Seyrig's continued requests for motivation to understand Dielman: 'it's just a feeling, I don't know'). Seyrig's presence towers over Akerman as a mother-like figure; she is both encouraging and authoritative, oscillating between a deep respect for Akerman, and excitement about her work, and a palpable frustration with what she perceives to be the lack of experience of those on set. Considering that Seyrig came from an established background in the film industry (she had starred in films directed by Alain Resnais, François Truffaut and Luis Buñuel), but was recently engaged in feminist video practice that sought to actively reject many of the working conditions and approaches of this industry, this video is a fascinating document of her own struggle to negotiate the gap between the two. Immediately clear from the documentary is that Seyrig was not used to these kinds of working conditions, and Frey, Akerman and Ravez do not shy away from exposing the contradictions or difficulties arising on set, with the penultimate shot showing an argument between Seyrig and members of the crew, particularly Bénie Deswarte the sound recordist, in which Seyrig accuses Bénie of behaving in both an unprofessional and anti-feminist manner, and remarks that she has never been on a film-set that is less hierarchical; a point about which, despite her deep-set commitment to abandoning the oppressive structures of the industry, she is clearly ambivalent.

Frey's dedicated attention to Seyrig's words provides a different perspective. Whilst *Jeanne Dielman*'s lack of dialogue is striking, *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* portrays the set as a space of constant debate and negotiation. It leaves a lot of space for explicit political discussion, alongside its exploration of more Akermanesque silent, embodied gestures (notably also the gestures of the filmmakers, for example, with the Portapak camera directed for a long time at the filmmakers whilst they film Seyrig, as if Frey sought to consciously expose and reflect on the mechanisms and processes of filming). The tape echoes the politics of feminist video-making at the time in France, which, as J.P. Fargier writes, was all about privileging the words of political activists, with 'speech that is not edited, divided, or 'butchered' . . . gradually unfolding in the spirit of resentment, anger, and enthusiasm' (Fargier, 1997: 51). Seyrig gives an interview about her feminist convictions halfway through the documentary, during a break on set, in full costume as Jeanne Dielman, apron on. The footage begins with her discussing the differences between male-directed films about women (citing Bergman as an example) and female-directed films. The two examples she gives - images of mothers and prostitutes - are central to Jeanne Dielman, who is both a mother and a prostitute. Seyrig sees female directors as necessarily and inherently providing a different perspective on women, and goes on to explain that 'all women are feminists, otherwise you would kill yourself', speaking against the backdrop of Dielman's apartment, with the female members of Akerman's crew reading the script whilst sitting at the dining room table. This is the same table at which we will see Jeanne sitting at the end of *Jeanne Dielman*, and in *Woman Sitting After Killing*. We see an alternative vision of domestic space, transformed into a film set and a place of creative work outside of its

function upholding patriarchal family structures. The table reminds us again of the feminist recuperations of the family dinner table. It is a surface on which to perform illegal abortions, for example, or around which to hold consciousness-raising groups during the 1970s and 80s. Ever-present in feminist videos made at the time, the dinner table was never used as a place for women to serve men food.

Jeanne Dielman and *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* both offer a different vision of feminist filmmaking, the making-of documentary addressing politics very explicitly, and through the crude imagery of the Portapak with its low-quality images, shot shakily on a handheld viewer, at times cutting off mid-way between scenes as the tape runs out, portraying a sense of intrepid curiosity that does not make any attempt to replicate Akerman and Babette Mangolte's celebrated, careful slow framing and camera work. One reason for this different aesthetic approach lies in the technological differences between 35mm filmmaking and Portable electronic video, which could not compete or compare with each other in any sense. *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* is arguably one of the most important documentaries about feminist filmmaking, revealing it as a place of continual negotiation, process and rehearsal. It shows an awareness, at the same time, of the tensions between recognising the work of individuals and the necessity of recognising the truly collaborative modes of collective work, often rendered invisible in a film's marketing: whether this is Akerman as an emerging auteur, Seyrig as iconic, experienced actress and all the bearing that has on her performance, or Babette Mangolte's influence as the film's cinematographer. The negotiation of space - with images of the entire female crew crammed into a

corridor filming scenes of a lonely Seyrig/Jeanne making the bed, for example - reveals how members of the cast and crew occupy space off-screen differently, what the working conditions are, and how each individual's politics and approach contributes to the overall result.

On the one hand, *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* reminds us that the film is not its making-of; whilst video, particularly as it was used in France in the 1970s, has a tendency to reveal its own mechanisms (to make the spectator aware of the fact that they are watching and often to urge them in some way to participate), this is not always necessarily the case for film (which of course can do this, but does not inherently do so). In terms of time and temporal distortion, time is rarely wasted or lost on a film set when resources are limited and time is scarce. The relationship between the time spent making and time spent watching, or even the feeling one has of time passing when watching a film, brings a whole new set of issues to Rich's comments on the materiality of a woman's time in the home. This is especially so when one thinks about the material conditions of the production of a film in the home. Yet on the other hand, *Autour de Jeanne Dielman*, released as a DVD extra, functions as a paratext that necessarily has a bearing on how we re-watch the film. To recall Genette's work on the literary paratext, which he describes as a 'threshold', or 'vestibule', a 'fringe [...] between the text and what lies outside it, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*; the privileged site of a pragmatics and a strategy' (1991: 261), the paratext always has a political function. *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* works to resituate *Jeanne Dielman* as an unquestionably feminist film; a film that was made in a feminist way (with an all-female cast and crew, and a commitment to

challenge the hierarchical structures of more conventional 'auteur' film directing), and deeply influenced by feminist debates of the time, as well as the emerging feminist film practices of the 1970s, with renewed interest in reproductive rights, in non-hierarchical, female-centred vision, and in alternative technologies, means and methods of exploring this.



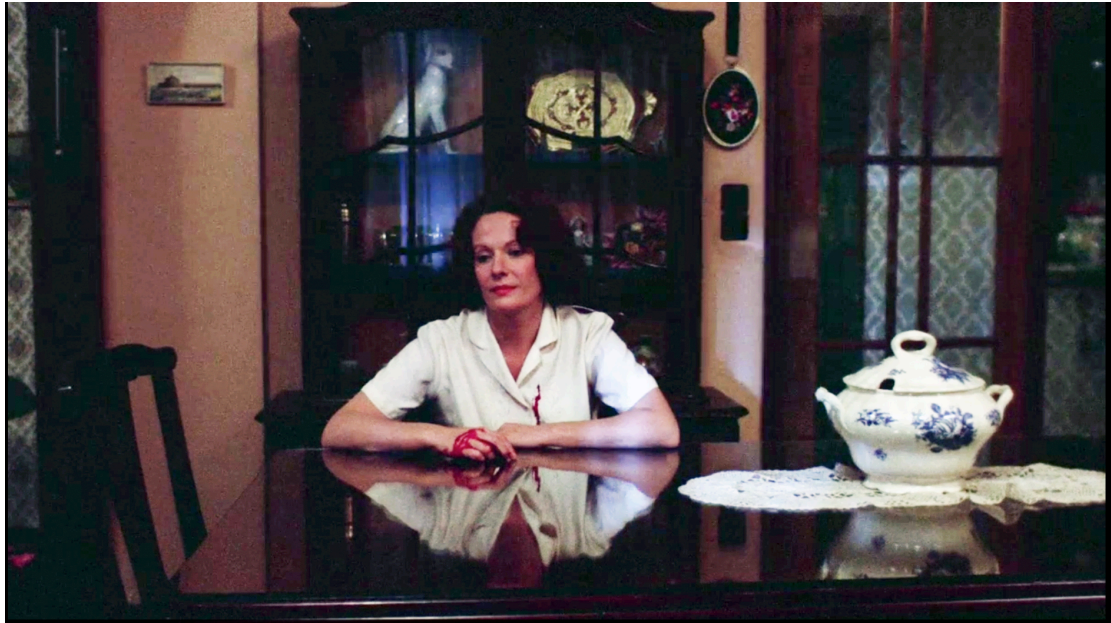
Woman Sitting After Killing: *ressassement* and repeating failure

Whilst *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* reveals Akerman and her team's working methods, and re-situates the film in its own present, the 2001 installation work that Akerman made for the Venice Biennale of the same year, *Woman Sitting After Killing*, constitutes a very different kind of temporal reworking, or *ressassement*. For this installation, Akerman took the final six-minute shot of Jeanne Dielman sitting at the dining room table following the murder, displaying

the same shot across seven screens, on a loop, with a slight time lapse between each screen. The spectator is presented with a series of oppositions, parallels or correspondences: the positioning of Jeanne on one side of the screen with a casserole dish on the other side sets up a parallel between the body and still life; the title of the film sets up a parallel between the particular (the implied Jeanne Dielman) and the general (here she is called 'woman'). There is an opposition between the apparently innocuous action of sitting (which also recalls the passivity of the sitter in portraiture), and the ethically-fraught and cinematically-sensationalised act of killing, which we see traces of in Dielman's blood-stained shirt. There are also parallel temporalities at work; that of the long shot in which nothing happens (this is the longest shot in the film), and the strict organisation of this time across seven monitors; but the spectator is free to organise her/his own consumption of this time as viewer, looking horizontally across screens and moving between them, as s/he pleases. The strict division between time and duration is disrupted by the rendering of the original's finite time infinite, when the sequence is made into a continuous loop. If *Jeanne Dielman* is a film that focuses on repeated gestures, whilst inserting one gesture that cannot be repeated (the murder), *Woman Sitting After Killing* further complicates narrative temporalities by revisiting this murder 26 years later, but without actually showing it. It suggests that what is significant about the film is not the murder but the sitting down afterwards.

One reason for insisting on this particular scene is that critics have continually returned to the orgasm and murder sequence as the climax of the film, and the locus of interpretation. Some argued that it offers an excess of meaning in a film

where meaning is largely absent. According to Akerman, following the Cannes screening of the film, Maguerite Duras told her that she should have left the murder out, much to Akerman's frustration (Brenez, 2011). Comparatively little attention has been paid to the final shot, which maintains the formal coherency of the film (camera angle, editing speed, composition of the frame and so on) whilst displaying the complete break down of Jeanne's own sense of coherency. Here, one might argue, is the first moment where Jeanne is doing nothing, where her gestures no longer fit within the economy of her time in the home. In her essay 'What's beneath her smile?', Flitterman-Lewis argues that Akerman offers a completely new expression of female subjectivity, refusing interiority: 'how can that elusive interiority be represented at all, since, by definition, it is unrepresentable?' (in Foster 1999: 36). The final shot, she argues, maintains Jeanne's enigma whilst shifting the focus on to the viewer: 'this character, who is only seen in surfaces, suddenly gains incredible depth by virtue of the viewer's attributions [...] Akerman has inverted the terms of identification, or invented new ones' (Foster, 1999: 38). In the context of an installation where the first two hours of the film, including the murder, are no longer there, this takes on a new dynamic. Akerman provides the murder in the title of the installation as a narrative detail, but what is missing are all the obsessive gestures and rituals that define Dielman's character; we simply see the moment where these have broken down, or the empty void of Jeanne 'at the table with time to spare' (Flitterman-Lewis in Foster 1999: 38).



One effect of the installation, then, is a certain form of abstraction. The specific designation of Jeanne in the title of the 1975 film, which not only provides her full name but also her address, whilst telling us absolutely nothing about the character, is transformed into the general 'woman' in the title of the installation. The most vital form of abstraction in *Jeanne Dielman* is perhaps the abstraction of the subject. If, as I have been arguing, the subject of the film is not Jeanne but time itself, we might also consider the abstraction of time that occurs in the transformation of film into installation. Catherine Fowler argues that 'in the absence of the accumulative structure of the 1975 film *Woman Sitting* becomes a still, flat image deprived of a memory, a history and a context' (Fowler: 2002). Yet I would argue that memory, history and context are an essential part of the viewer's experience of *Woman Sitting After Killing*: the décor and costume situates the film squarely in the mid-1970s, and the installation clearly plays on the cinematic memory of the film. As a digital reworking of a 35mm film, we see the traces of an older form of media, and we also see a certain kind of ghosting in the iconic image of Seyrig nearly seventeen years after her death. *Woman Sitting*

After Killing is in some senses a homage to Seyrig, or more importantly a return to a valued friend, as well as a return to Akerman's most celebrated film. What is transformed most obviously in the form of the installation is the viewer's relationship to the image. Whilst *Jeanne Dielman* itself seems to require a more active form of spectatorship that critics have associated with the counter-cinematic (Flitterman-Lewis, drawing on Claire Johnston), and with slow cinema, an active spectator is perhaps even more intrinsic to *Woman Sitting After Killing*. The placing of the shot in a loop inaugurates a transformation of our relationship to the time of the shot; it is not so much that there is no beginning and no end, but that these are both dependent on our movements leaving and entering the room.

Akerman argues:

Time doesn't only exist in the shot. It also exists in the spectator who watches it. He feels this time, in himself. Even if he claims that he gets bored. And even if he really does get bored as he waits for the following shot. Waiting for the following shot is also and already feeling oneself alive, feeling oneself exist (Akerman, 2004: 38).

Yet there is no following shot in the installation; it is the experience of waiting for nothing that is distilled in *Woman Sitting After Killing*. The spectator's question is no longer 'what will happen next?' but even more explicitly 'how long should I stay and watch this?' There is a shift from time explored as a diegetic problem to the problem of the spectator's experience of time and control of that

experience when we are no longer subjected to the length of the film. In *Jeanne Dielman* we witness what happens when a strict timetable gradually unravels; Akerman has argued, citing Bataille, that it is in fact a film about timetabling, or the organisation of time, more specifically than time (Akerman, 2004: 44). The cinema also adheres to its own strict form of timetabling and scheduling, and this is unravelled in the digital installation. As *Jeanne Dielman* so emphatically reminds us, one way of trying to control our experience of time (to create a timetable) is through repeated gestures or rituals. As Akerman's search for lost time takes the form of repetition, it is no surprise that she uses a continuous loop on returning to Jeanne Dielman. As Matthieu Orléan argues, the installation thereby extracts an 'essential substance' from the film, 'without a beginning, without an end, without cause and without effect' (in Akerman 2004: 219). If the film tells us that no gesture can ever be repeated the same way twice, the installation tells us that it can be digitally reproduced the same way twice, yet our experience of each of these reproductions will still be different. In this sense we are not seeing the same thing (not) happening over and over again.

In 'Death Every Afternoon', André Bazin writes that 'the cinema attains and constructs its aesthetic time based on lived time, Bergsonian 'durée', which is in essence irreversible and qualitative' (Margulies, 2003: 32). The two events that represent 'the qualitative instant in its purest form', according to Bazin, are sex and death. As Bazin points out, cinema allows us to repeat these experiences, but both *Jeanne Dielman* and *Woman Sitting After Killing* enact a feminist mise-en-abyme of this repetition itself. A feminist take on Bazin's 'death every afternoon' might be that of being bored to death every afternoon by the drudgery of

housework and its place within domestic temporal economies. Time becomes murderous if one is stuck in the home, where the act of killing makes less of an impression than the time of peeling potatoes or simply sitting down. If *Jeanne Dielman* is a film about the nostalgia of lost rituals, as Mangolte argues, *Woman Sitting After Killing* suggests precisely that we might look elsewhere for productive labour. It is sitting down, not working (given that Jeanne's home is also her work place) and doing nothing that is cinematically productive; not having sex and dying. Jeanne Dielman's careful repetition of the same gestures day-in-day-out thus exposes the irreversibility of qualitative experience, seeking out the potential correspondences between what is absolutely unrepeatable (that experience) and a failed desire to contain this excess within meticulously repeated and regimented structure. *Woman Sitting After Killing* continually repeats the irreversible and unrepeatable moment on a digital loop in which we witness Dielman's *ressassement* of her own actions ('after killing') at the same time as one instance of Akerman's *ressassement* of her film.

The installation's spatial organisation of this repetition is equally significant. It functions almost as a timetable in the sense of a visual and spatialised representation of the organisation of time across seven days. The use of seven screens recalls the religious ('lost') rituals that underpin, through their absence, the temporalities of the film. In the Old Testament it is on the seventh day that God sits and does nothing, after creating the world. The seven screens almost corresponds to the number of minutes (just over six) that Jeanne sits for after the murder, so that each monitor almost, but not quite, corresponds to a minute of Jeanne's time. Again, then, we have the opposition between the strict

measurement of time and the way it is experienced by both the body on the screens and the chaos of bodies passing in and out of the gallery space. And in thinking about that embodied engagement with the installation work, as Jenny Chamarette reminds us, both our engagement with the work and the work itself is ultimately ephemeral; the spectatorial response fluctuating between attention and inattention, whilst 'the work itself disappears' because it is always site-specific and temporally-limited (Chamarette, 2013: 347).

To return to the question raised at the beginning of this article, Akerman's *ressassement*, which happens on both a microcosmic scale within the film (structured and governed by this ongoing process), as well as in a broader sense across Akerman's work, might be taken as one response to the demands of chrononormativity. *Ressassement* implies being stuck, being unable and unwilling to move on. It is a form of repetition that replaces lost rituals (in Akerman's case Jewish rituals), but that always and inevitably fails, which is what paradoxically guarantees its success, because it must continue ad infinitum, even if only as ephemeral or ghostly trace. The final six minutes of *Jeanne Dielman* are, for the character, the culmination of the gradual failure of a strict regime. It is not the murder, then, that represents the moment of rupture, but the failure of repetition. In the sense that it must always fail, it corresponds to a particular form of queer failure that exposes the failure of the chrononormative myth, in other words, the idea that we should look towards the future, towards future generations and future modes of representation, to fix the problems of the present. Akerman's work, on the contrary, often seems to return to the past, representing a refusal to grow up (see Chamarette, 2019), progress in the proper

way or, to recall Freeman's words cited towards the beginning of this article, to enter into the temporal systems that render a body 'socially meaningful or legible' (Freeman, 2010: 61).

This unrepresentability is explicit in Seyrig and Akerman's constant discussions in *Autour de Jeanne Dielman* around avoiding any kind of psychological framework through which to frame or shape Jeanne's gestures. A resistance to the dominant critical frameworks for feminist film criticism of the 1970s explains some of Akerman's reticence in describing *Jeanne Dielman* as a feminist film, and much of the current work on Akerman approaches her films and installations from a phenomenological perspective through which gesture can be understood as a mode of, relating, or failing to relate to, being in the world, distancing it from a (purely) psychoanalytic approach. Akerman's *ressassement* in *Jeanne Dielman*'s paratexts is ultimately a form work of feminist re-enactment in which the body, rather than a subject, always plays a central role (as it does in the film). *Ressassement* becomes a queer and feminist practice in which banging on about nothing, paying attention to a certain form of invisible nagging, continually rehearsing and repeating the failure of structures, systems and timetables to contain or even to produce a subject, becomes productive work; as Jeanne Dielman seems to cry out, even long after the end of Akerman's own obsessive repetitions: 'in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on' (Beckett, 2010 [1953]: 134).

Both of these paratexts then revisit Rich's question of the materiality of a woman's time in the home to bring to the fore the materiality of a group of

women's time making a film in the home; and equally the materiality of the time of watching a film, thus questioning in an explicit sense the time of viewing when it is no longer a film, but an installation (with no apparent end), or a video that asks us to watch, rewatch, repeat and rehearse the rehearsals themselves. *Autour de Jeanne Dielman*, significantly, renders this an explicitly feminist process by hammering its point home; the film itself was an exercise in feminist ways of working, which often involved complex discussions and tensions that were not resolved, but nonetheless added something important to the film's essence and existence beyond what can be understood via an explicitly and solely auteurist approach. Yet both the installation and the video work towards the construction of new forms of viewing time; we are reminded not only of the drudgery of housework transformed into mysterious ritual, but of the unrepeatable repetition of Seyrig's performance, the processes by which the film was made, and the abstraction of time at the very moment the timetable breaks down, as all of these elements interact with, through and across different media.

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